

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY LONDON

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 017584

STADIS////////////////////////////////////

FOLLOWING REPEAT DOHA 1516 ACTION SECSTATE INFO ABU DHABI JIDDA
KUWAIT MANAMA MUSCAT SANA TEHRAN
DEC 28 77

QUOTE: C O N F I D E N T I A L DOHA 1516

STADIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, QA

SUBJECT: QATARI REQUEST FOR 155 MM SELF PROPELLED HOWITZERS

REF: (A) DOHA 1241; (B) STATE 297901; (C) KUWAIT 7059 (NOTAL);
(D) DOHA 1456 (NOTAL); (E) STATE 290786

1. SUMMARY: DE FACTO CHIEF OF QATARI ARMED FORCES WAS DISAPPOINTED
BUT POLITE ON BEING TOLD THAT THE USG WOULD NOT SELL QATAR ANY
155 MM SELF PROPELLED HOWITZERS. HOWEVER, THE AMIR OF QATAR HAS
STRONGLY CRITICIZED US POLICY ON SALE OF ARMS TO THE LOWER GULF
STATES, PROFESSING NOT TO UNDERSTAND THE POLICY AND URGING THAT
MODIFICATIONS BE MADE IN THE INTEREST OF CLOSE RELATIONS BETWEEN
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THE UNITED STATES AND QATAR AND THE OTHER LOWER GULF STATES. END
SUMMARY.

2. ON DECEMBER 18 I CALLED ON SHEIKH ABDALLAH BIN KHALIFA AL
THANI, DE FACTO CHIEF OF THE QATARI ARMY, TO INFORM HIM WE COULD
NOT SELL QATAR THE REQUESTED HOWITZERS, AND THE REASONS WHY WE
WOULD NOT. (COMMENT: I REFRAINED FROM MENTIONING THE UNLIKELIHOOD

(REFTEL B) OF AN EXTERNAL INVASION OF QATAR INVOLVING ARMOR OR LARGE TROOP CONCENTRATIONS AS FIGURING IN OUR NEGATIVE REPLY, OUT OF CONCERN THAT ABDALLAH AND SHAMS-EDDINE MIGHT HAVE NOTED THAT IF THAT TEST WERE APPLIED NOT MANY COUNTRIES WOULD HAVE 155 MM HOWITZERS. I ALSO DID NOT VENTURE INTO THE TRICKY IDEOLOGICAL AREA OF THE RECIPIENT'S PRESTIGUE (REFTEL E) BECAUSE I THINK IT REPRESENTS MORE OF AN IDEALIZED VISION OF A PURE AMERICA THAN IS WARRANTED BY REALITY.
END COMMENT).

COL. SHAMS-EDDINE, A JORDANIAN ARMY COLONEL DETAILED TO THE QATAR ARMY, WAS ALSO PRESENT. ABDALLAH RECEIVED THE NEGATIVE RESPONSE IN APPARENT GOOD HUMOR. COL. SHAMS-EDDINE, WHO DESCRIBED HIMSELF AS AN ORDNANCE OFFICER, POINTED OUT THAT QATAR COULD BUY HOWITZERS FROM ONE OF SEVERAL COUNTRIES, BUT HAD PREFERRED THE UNITED STATES AS A SOURCE FOR SEVERAL REASONS. ONE WAS THAT AMERICAN ARTILLERY IS SUPERIOR TO OTHERS AND GIVEN THE HIGH QUALITY IS CHEAPER. ANOTHER REASON IS THAT A SMALL MILITARY SUPPLY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNITED STATES WOULD MEAN A VARIETY OF CONTACTS, AND EXCHANGES OF VISITS WHICH QATAR DESIRED WITH THE UNITED STATES. (COMMENT: WHAT THIS MEANS, ARTILLERY ASIDE, IS THAT QATAR WANTS TO BE CLOSER TO THE UNITED STATES. END COMMENT.)

3. THE DECEMBER 18 SESSION WITH ABDALLAH AND SHAMS-EDDINE WAS OVERSHADOWED, HOWEVER, BY A FORCEFUL AND SPIRITED ATTACK BY AMIR KHALIFA ON U.S. ARMS SALES POLICY VIS-A-VIS THE LOWER PERSIAN
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GULF STATES WHEN I SAW THE AMIR DECEMBER 15 ON ANOTHER SUBJECT. AFTER THAT SUBJECT (REFTEL D) WAS CONCLUDED, KHALIFA LAUNCHED INTO THE MATTER OF RESTRICTIONS ON AMERICAN ARMS SALES TO THE LOWER GULF STATES, PROFESSING NOT TO UNDERSTAND U.S. RELUCTANCE. WAS QATAR NOT AN INDEPENDENT COUNTRY, HE INQUIRED ORATORICALLY? DID QATAR NOT HAVE THE MONEY TO PAY FOR THE ARMS IT WANTED? DID WE IMAGINE THAT QATAR COULD NOT PURCHASE ARMS ELSEWHERE? (IN THIS CONNECTION, QATAR IS BELIEVED TO HAVE RECENTLY PURCHASED 24 TANKS FROM FRANCE.) DID AN ENEMY HAVE TO BE POISED AT QATAR'S BORDERS BEFORE SOME REASONABLE DEFENSE CAPABILITY WAS CREATED? DID THE UNITED STATES NOT COME TO QATAR ASKING FOR COOPERATION WHEN IT WANTED SOMETHING? IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WAS IT FAIR FOR THE UNITED STATES TO TREAT QATAR THIS WAY ON ARMS?

4. I SAID I WAS SURPRISED AT THE AMIR'S REMARKS, THAT I HAD HEARD OF NO REQUESTS OTHER THAN AN INQUIRY IN PRINCIPLE ABOUT SELLING SOME HOWITZERS. WHILE THE OUTLOOK ON HOWITZERS WAS ADMITTEDLY NOT BRIGHT, I COULD HARDLY SEE THAT THAT WAS JUSTIFICATIONS FOR SAYING THE UNITED STATES WAS UNSYMPATHETIC TO QATAR'S NEEDS.

5. KHALIFA SAID HE WAS NOT TALKING JUST ABOUT QATAR BUT ABOUT

THE OTHER GULF STATES AS WELL. HE WAVED HIS HANDS IN A GESTURE INDICATING HIS NEIGHBORS, SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES. THESE GULF COUNTRIES WERE INDEPENDENT, HAD MONEY AND NO ONE COULD SAY THAT THEY DID NOT HAVE DEFENSE NEEDS, THE AMIR ARGUED. AS KHALIFA AND I HAD ALREADY TALKED MORE THAN AN HOUR, I DID NOT PURSUE THE SUBJECT BUT SAID I WOULD REPORT HIS CONCERNS TO THE DEPARTMENT AND GET WHATEVER FURTHER CLARIFICATION WASHINGTON MIGHT BE ABLE TO OFFER

6. COMMENT: THE UNEXPECTED FORCE OF AMIR KHALIFA'S CRITICISM OF OUR LOWER GULF ARMS POLICY SUGGESTS THAT THIS ISSUE COULD BECOME A SOURCE OF FRICTION BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND QATAR. WHAT MAY HAVE TRIGGERED HIS CRITICISM IS UNCLEAR. THE POSSIBILITY OCCURS TO THE EMBASSY THAT THE AMIRS OF QATAR, SAUDI ARABIA AND THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES MAY HAVE COMPARED NOTES ON USG RESTRICTIONS
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AND AGREED TO PROTEST US ARMS SALES POLICY. BUT THIS IS ONLY SPECULATION. MORE CONCRETELY, WE DO RECALL THAT THE CROWN PRINCE OF SAUDI ARABIA RECENTLY SPENT THREE DAYS HERE WITH THE CROWN PRINCE OF QATAR. BOTH MEN ARE ALSO THE MINISTERS OF DEFENSE IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES. IT IS NOT IMPROBABLE THAT DISCUSSIONS OF NEEDS OCCURRED.

7. COMMENT CONTINUED: THE AMIR OF QATAR, WHO SEES HIMSELF (CORRECTLY) AS A CLOSE FRIEND OF THE UNITED STATES, IS OBVIOUSLY A MAN WITH PROBLEMS OF DEFENSE ON HIS MIND. THE QATARI ARMY HAS ALREADY GROWN TO 7,000 IN NUMBER, WHILE THE POLICE FORCE SEEMS LIKELY TO ACHIEVE SOON A SIMILAR LEVEL. JUST WHAT THE SOURCE OF AMIR KHALIFA'S APPREHENSIONS MAY BE IS NOT CLEAR, BUT THE LOGICAL PLACE TO LOOK IS TOWARDS IRAN. THE AMIR HIMSELF HAS NEVER VENTURED ANYTHING EXPLICIT, BUT I DO RECALL SEVERAL HOURS SPENT WITH ISSA AL KAWARI, MINISTER OF INFORMATION AND DIRECTOR OF THE AMIR'S OFFICE, ABOUT TWO MONTHS AGO IN WHICH AL KAWARI ASKED A VISITING AMERICAN WHO HAD JUST COME FROM IRAN, "WHAT IS THE SHAH GOING TO DO WITH ALL OF THOSE ARMS?" AL KAWARI REPEATED THIS QUESTION SEVERAL TIMES DURING THE EVENING AND GIVEN HIS PERSONALITY AND HIS CLOSENESS TO THE AMIR, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT AL KAWARI WAS VOICING AMIR KHALIFA'S CONCERNS.

8. COMMENT CONTINUED: IT OCCURS TO ME THAT MANY, MANY CIRCUMSTANCES HAVE CHANGED IN THE LOWER GULF SINCE OUR CURRENT POLICY WAS ENUNCIATED FIVE TO SIX YEARS AGO, MAKING ANOTHER LOOK AT THE ARMS POLICY PERHAPS A WISE THING TO DO AT THIS TIME. POSSIBLY, OTHER GULF EMBASSIES MAY HAVE SOME COMMENT IN THIS REGARD. BUT IN ANY CASE, THE SITUATION HAS CERTAINLY CHANGED IN QATAR IN THE PAST SIX YEARS. ONE OF THE OBVIOUS CHANGES IS THAT QATAR NOW HAS FIVE TO SIX TIMES THE OIL INCOME IT HAD WHEN THE ARMS POLICY WAS FORMULATED. OTHER INCOME HAS ALSO GREATLY INCREASED. ANOTHER THING IS THAT DURING THE PAST FIVE TO SIX YEARS
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OUTSPOKENLY ARYAN IRAN HAS INCREASED SEVERAL TIMES THE LEVEL OF ITS OWN ARMAMENTS, A DEVELOPMENT THAT THE ARAB SEMITES AT LEAST HERE IN QATAR VIEW WITH LESS THAN TOTAL EQUANIMITY. FINALLY, IN THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, THE AMIR OF QATAR HAS GRADUALLY COME TO REALIZE THAT QATAR OWNS OFFSHORE CERTAINLY ONE OF THE LARGEST GAS FIELDS IN THE WORLD, ESTIMATED TO BE WORTH AT A VERY MINIMUM 140 BILLION DOLLARS AT CURRENT PRICES. AND WE HAVE HEARD ESTIMATES HERE THAT THE WORTH OF QATAR'S GAS COULD BE MORE THAN ONE HALF A TRILLION DOLLARS OF TODAY'S VALUE.

9. COMMENT CONTINUED: AS WE HAVE ATTEMPTED TO STRESS IN OUR REPORTING, QATAR FEELS ITSELF TO BE A RELATIVELY FRAGILE POLITICAL ENTITY HOPING AS HARD AS IT CAN HOPE FOR CLOSER TIES WITH THE BIG POWERS, ESPECIALLY THE UNITED STATES. THE GREATER THESE TIES, THE MORE QATAR WILL HAVE A SENSE OF SECURITY. UNTIL THE GAS WAS KNOWN ABOUT, AMIR KHALIFA COULD ENVISAGE CONTINUED PROSPERITY FROM OIL FOR NO MORE THAN ANOTHER 20 YEARS. BUT NOW HE AND THE GOQ CAN LOOK FORWARD TO A CENTURY OR PERHAPS TWO CENTURIES OF INCREASING EMINENCE IN THE FIELD OF ENERGY. AND THE AMIR HAS HARDLY A GUN TO PROTECT HIS GREAT WEALTH. THUS, IT WOULD NOT BE SURPRISING AT ALL TO ME IF WE RECEIVE REQUESTS TO SELL AT LEAST SOME NAVY SHIPS TO QATAR TO DEFEND ITS FANTASTIC LEGACY OF GAS WEALTH.

10. REQUEST FOR ACTION: THAT THE DEPARTMENT UNDERTAKE TO LOOK AGAIN AT THE LOWER GULF ARMS POLICY WITH A VIEW TO RELAXING CURRENT RESTRICTIONS IN A MODERATE WAY TO FACE THE NEW REALITIES OF THE LOWER GULF. WHILE THE INSTRUCTIONS I HAVE RECEIVED CORRECTLY STATE THAT QATAR FACES NO IMMEDIATE OR IMMINENT MILITARY THREAT, I BELIEVE A GOOD CASE CAN BE MADE THAT QATAR NEVERTHELESS IS ENTITLED TO BUILD UP AT LEAST A MODERATE DEFENSE DETERRENT, AND THAT THE UNITED STATES CAN PROMOTE ITS INTERESTS BY HELPING THE GOQ TO DO SO.

KILLGORE

UNQUOTE VANCE

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